

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 0656

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PSDC PINT CU XJ MILI
SUBJECT: INITIAL CUBAN REACTION TO USG STATEMENTS ON AFRICA

1. SUMMARY: USG STATEMENT ON CUBAN POLICY IN AFRICA MAY HAVE CAUSED PRIVATE CONCERN, BUT PUBLICLY CUBANS, AT LEAST INITIALLY, REFRAIN FROM HARSH REJOINDERS. END SUMMARY

2. FIDEL CASTRO, IN FOUR-HOUR DISCUSSION WITH BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL (BI) ROUNDTABLE HERE, NOVEMBER 18, REPORTEDLY AVOIDED ANY MENTION OF USG STATEMENTS ON CUBAN MILITARY POLICY IN AFRICA. CASTRO DID NOT MENTION OR CRITICIZE THE PRESIDENT, AND ACCORDING TO US PARTICIPANTS, CASTRO SPOKE "FERVENTLY" IN SUPPORT OF US-CUBAN NORMALIZATION, PARTICULARLY REMOVAL OF EMBARGO. IN ONLY INTERVENTION ON AFRICA, CASTRO CLAIMED THAT CUBANS HAD ONLY INCREASED ANGOLA TROOP LEVEL ONCE - IN MAY, 1977, AND THIS HAD BEEN DONE, HE SAID, PURSUANT TO CUBA-ANGOLA AGREEMENT CONCLUDED "ONE YEAR AGO". CASTRO SAID THAT, IF US HAD ANY COMPLAINTS, THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN RAISED AT TIME OF CUBA-ANGOLA AGREEMENT, NOT NOW. CASTRO DID NOT SUGGEST, HOWEVER, THAT HE WOULD HAVE BEEN RESPONSIVE TO US CONCERNS AT EARLIER DATE. INDEED, BOTH HE AND FOREIGN POLICY CZAR CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ REITERATED TO BUSINESSMEN
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LONGSTANDING CUBAN POSITION THAT CUBAN AFRICAN MILITARY PRESENCE CANNOT BE SUBJECT FOR "NEGOTIATION" WITH US. (COMMENT: A SENIOR CUBAN OFFICIAL STATED, NOVEMBER 18, THAT CASTRO IS EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO AUTHORIZE PUBLISHED DECLARATIONS ON CUBAN MILITARY POLICY IN AFRICA. HE SAID THAT PRIVATE COMMENTS TO US OFFICIALS AND OFF-THE-RECORD STATEMENTS TO SELECT GROUPS SUCH AS BI WILL CONSTITUTE AURHORITATIVE, AND PROBABLY ONLY, CUBAN REACTION TO USG

STATEMENTS. IF LOW-KEY CASTRO COMMENT ON AFRICA IS MEANT TO CONVEY SIGNAL TO US, THE MESSAGE WOULD APPEAR TO BE THAT, REGARDLESS OF USG STATEMENTS, CUBANS CONTINUE TO BE HIGHLY INTERESTED IN NORMALIZATION WITH US. THIS MAY IMPLY MORE FLEXIBILITY IN CUBAN POSITION ON THEIR MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFRICA THAN "NO NEGOTIATION" POSTURE MIGHT SUGGEST.)

3. CUBAN MEDIA CONTINUE TO AVOID MENTIONING USG STATEMENTS (JUST AS THEY HAVE BLACKED OUT ALL NEWS ON SOMALI BREAK WITH CUBA.) AS USUAL, NO NEWS IS CARRIED ON CUBAN MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN ANGOLA AND OTHER COUNTRIES. IN INTERESTING MOVE, PRESUMABLY TO DEMONS

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STRATE RECEPTIVENESS OF AFRICANS TO CUBAN PRESENCE, GRANMA, NOVEMBER 21, REPORTS THAT RAUL VALDES VIVO, CHIEF OF CUBAN CP FOREIGN RELATIONS DEPARTMENT, ACCOMPANIED ZAMBIAN PRESIDENT KAUNDA IN LATTER'S PLANE FOR PARTICIPATION IN WEEKEND MEETING WITH TANZANIAN PRESIDENT NYERERE.

4. COMMENT: CONTRARY TO SOME CUBANS' EXPECTATION, PUBLIC REACTION TO USG STATEMENTS APPEARS SO FAR TO BE MILD. CASTRO APPARENTLY HAS BECOME HEAVILY COMMITTED, PRESUMABLY FOR ECONOMIC REASONS, TO US-CUBAN NORMALIZATION PROCESS - A COMMITMENT WHICH US BUSINESSMEN HERE FOR BI ROUNDTABLE FOUND STRIKING. CASTRO MAY NOT WISH TO DERAIL PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER MOVEMENT BY INTEMPERATE STATEMENTS AT THIS JUNCTURE - PARTICULARLY IF HE RATIONALIZES USG STATEMENTS AS ADMINISTRATION COUNTER TO DOMESTIC ACCUSATIONS OF SOFTNESS ON CONFIDENTIAL

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PANAMA CANAL. NONETHELESS, CUBANS PRESUMABLY ARE AWARE THAT, IN LIGHT OF LAST WEEK'S USG'S STATEMENTS ON AFRICAN POLICY, SUCCESS IN ACHIEVING CUBAN REDUCTION OF AFRICAN TROOP PRESENCE NOW WILL BECOME NECESSARY BENCHMARK IN EVALUATING SUCCESS OF ANY FURTHER US OPENING TOWARD CUBA. UNLESS CASTRO IS REASONABLY CERTAIN THAT CUBAN TROOP LEVELS ABROAD WILL SOON SINK, HIS FRUSTRATION WITH US STATEMENTS MAY BEGIN TO SHOW (PERHAPS IN DECEMBER 2 SPEECH ON ANNIVERSARY OF GRANMA LANDING.)

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